NCA
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SPAIN AND NATO

ANNCR:

SPANISH POLITICAL FIGURES ARE PONDERING THE PROS AND CONS OF JOINING THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION. A KEY ELEMENT IN THEIR ANALYSIS IS PRESSURE FROM AFRICAN STATES WITH RESPECT TO THE CANARY ISLANDS. HARRY DEBELIUS SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM MADRID.

VOICE:

A NUMBER OF DIPLOMATS HERE IN MADRID HAVE EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT ONE IMPORTANT EFFECT OF THE AFRICAN CLAIM TO THE CANARY ISLANDS IS THE SPEEDUP IN SPAIN'S APPROACH TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION. WHILE THE QUESTION OF EVENTUAL MEMBERSHIP IN NATO IS BEING DEBATED IN MADRID, SPAIN'S NEED TO STRENGTHEN POLITICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY DEFENSE SYSTEMS FOR THE CANARY ISLANDS BECOMES MORE EVIDENT. IT'S A VITAL ISSUE FOR THIS NEWLY DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY, EVEN WITHOUT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PRESSURE FROM THE ORGANIZATION FOR AFRICAN UNITY ON THE CANARY ARCHIPELAGO, SPAIN'S MOST DISTANT REGION.

FOREIGN MINISTER MARCELINO OREJA POINTED OUT HERE IN A RECENT ADDRESS TO THE SPANISH SENATE THAT UNARMED NEUTRALITY FOR A COUNTRY IN SPAIN'S GEO-STRATEGIC POSITION WOULD -- AS HE PUT IT -- BE NOTHING MORE THAN A DANGEROUS UTOPIA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FOREIGN MINISTER MAINTAINED, THOSE WHO HAVE OPTED FOR ARMED NETURALITY ARE PAYING FOR IT AT A COST WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY UNTHINKABLE IN THE LONG RUN FOR SPAIN AND WITH RESULTS WHICH ARE MORE APPARENT THAN REAL. MISTER OREJA HAS

TWICE PRESENTED THE GOVERNMENT'S OPINION IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT THAT SPAIN SHOULD JOIN THE NATO ALLIANCE. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOVERNMENT, HEADED BY PRIME MINISTER ADOLFO SUAREZ, WANTS TO AVOID CRITICISM THAT IT'S VIOLATING ITS GENERAL POLICY OF CONSENSUS AMONG THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES. FOR THIS REASON, FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA HAS REPEATEDLY SAID THAT THERE SHOULD BE A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE ISSUE BEFORE ANY DECISION IS REACHED.

N O T ALL OF SPAIN'S POLITICAL PARTIES ARE ANXIOUS TO MAKE SPAIN A NATO PARTNER. THE SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY FAVORS A NEUTRAL SPAIN, BELONGING NEITHER TO NATO NOR TO THE WARSAW PACT. THE SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY ALSO OPPOSES NATO MEMBERSHIP. BUT AS A SPOKESMAN FOR PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ'S DEMOCRATIC CENTER UNION TOLD THIS CORRESPONDENT, THE SOCIALISTS DON'T SEEM TO BE PROTESTING AS LOUDLY AS THEY DID BEFORE. THIS MAY BE BECAUSE OF A CLOSING IN RANKS BY ALL MAJOR PARTIES IN THE FACE OF SUPPORT FROM THE ORGANIZATION FOR AFRICAN UNITY FOR A CANARY ISLAND SEPARATIST MOVEMENT. IF SPAIN IS TO RETAIN ITS LINKS WITH THE WEST, THE NATO QUESTION CANNOT BE PUT OFF TOO LONG. THE CURRENT TREATY ALLOWING AMERICAN FORCES TO USE BASES IN SPAIN RUNS OUT IN 1981. AND, IF THERE IS SOME DOUBT WHETHER SPAIN WILL JOIN THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE, THERE'S EVEN MORE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF RENEWAL OF THE BILATERAL TREATY WITH THE UNITED STATES. THE FACT IS THAT SOME GENERALS FEEL THAT SPAIN IS BETTER OFF WITH A SPECIAL RELATION WITH THE UNITED STATES WHICH GIVES SPAIN ADVANTAGES OF NATO WITHOUT BELONGING. WASHINGTON HAS FOR YEARS BEEN IN FAVOR OF CLOSER SPANISH TIES WITH NATO, BUT HAS LEFT THE INITIATIVE TO SPAIN. AT THE SAME TIME, NATO COUNTRIES WITH STRONG SOCIALIST PARTIES HAVE TRADITIONALLY OPPOSED SPAIN'S ADMISSION TO NATO, ALTHOUGH THIS OPPOSITION HAS TAPERED OFF SOMEWHAT SINCE FRANCO'S DEATH.
JS/RCS